Berets Celebrate With Beer Party

LONG BINH, Vietnam (AP) — News that the Army had dropped all charges against them touched off an impromptu beer party early Tuesday among principals in the Green Beret murder case. "They were blowing their corks," said an officer who wandered by and was drawn into the party.

But word of Washington's decision was received in silence by the U.S. military command in Saigon. A spokesman said only that the announcement "speaks for itself."

Col. Robert B. Rheault, 43, former Green Beret commander, obviously was taken by surprise at the Army's decision to free him and seven other Berets in the death of an alleged Vietnamese double agent.

But he said he had never doubted the outcome— "the only question was how long and how difficult it would be to prove the point."

"The agony our families had to suffer has been brought to a close. We consider ourselves tough cookies, but it was difficult for our families," Rheault said in an interview outside the quarters where he and five other officers had been in custody for weeks.

They had been awaiting general courts-martial and had been in custory since mid-July.

Rheault acted as spokesman for all the freed men. He declined to discuss details of the alleged incident that had brought about the sensational charges against them.

Rheault also declined to make any speculation about his future.

He was awakened about 3 a.m., Vietnam time, first by a friend and then by newsmen, with word of the Washington announcement by Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor.

"I woke everybody out of a sound sleep," Rheault said.

Defense attorneys for the men also learned of the dismissal and gathered at the bachelor officers' quarters where the beer party began before dawn and continued until daylight.

Following the initial notification, however, there was a relatively subdued atmosphere in the quarters as the men strode off to breakfast after dawn.

Official notification came from military authorities at the

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big army headquarters base at Long Binh, 12 miles northeast of Saigon 24 hours after the first report from Washington.

The men were officially notified at 5:30 a.m. by the brigade commander of the military police at the Long Binh post. He came by the quarters and spoke to them personally.

Notified separately were CWO2 Edward M. Boyle, of New York City and Sgt.1.C. Alvin L. Smith Jr., of Naples, Fla., against whom similar charges had been held in abeyance. The Army had declared them immune from the murder and conspiracy charges and defense attorneys said the Army planned to use their testimony against the other men.

Capt. Robert F. Marasco, 27, of Bloomfield, N.J. said he was informed through his congressmen, Rep. Peter W. Rodino Jr., D-N.J., that the announcement of their release was also made on the floor of Congress "and was received with a standing ovation."

Marasco, named by the Army as triggerman in the alleged slaying last June 20, added: "There is no real way we can thank the congressmen, especially Rodino, who have championed our cause from the beginning."

Immediately upon official word to the Green Berets that the charges were dismissed, military authorities lifted all restraints which had been imposed on the men. They still stayed together and went as a group to breakfast.

Asked whether he thought the men would stay in the Army after their ordeal, Rheault said he could not speak for the others but said "their decisions may certainly be colored by this incident."

He said several of his comrades were near the end of their service obligations and had expressed the intention to leave the Army before the murder case developed.

As for himself, the West Point-trained career officer from Vineyard Haven, Mass., said, "I withhold judgment."

The slender, blond and crewcut colonel paused a moment.

"It's been quite a nightmare. This is like waking up from it," he said.

A spokesman for the U.S. Army headquarters in Vietnam said the official message from Secretary Resor was received at 5 a.m. Saigon time. The Message was addressed to Maj. Gen. George L. Mabry, commander of support troops in Vietnam who was the convening authority in the case.

An information copy also was sent to Gen. Creighton W.

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Abrams, commander of all U.S. forces in Vietnam.

The one-paragraph message said:

"Acting as a superior convening authority under the provisions of article 22, uniform code of military justice, I hereby assume jurisdiction over and hereby dismiss the courts-martial charges against Col. Rheault, Majors Crew and Middleton, captains Brumley, Marasco and Williams, EW2 Boyle, and Sgt.1C Smith, allegning conspiracy to murder in the murder of one Chuyen on or about 20 June 1969. From Secretary of the Army Resor."

An army spokesman said all the men "were officially notified that they were released from confinement" within 40 minutes of the arrival of Resor's message.

"They are not under charges. They are not under confinement, they are free agents," the spokesman said.

He said the men would be flown back to the United States, possibly later Tuesday.